

Information

Birch Creek is one of Alaska’s 25 national wild & scenic rivers.

The Bureau of Land Management administers Birch Creek to provide high-quality primitive recreational opportunities, protect water quality, protect historic and archeological values, and preserve the character of the river.

All visitors should have detailed USGS maps covering Birch Creek National Wild River: Alaska Circle B-1 through B-4 and Circle C-1. Be aware that as you “come out of the hills” onto the flats by the dome named Beauty, the river has changed course since the last USGS update of the maps.

For more information:

**Bureau of Land Management
Northern Field Office
1150 University Avenue
Fairbanks, Alaska 99709-3844
907-474-2200
<http://aurora.ak.blm.gov/>**

**Alaska Public Lands Information Center
250 Cushman, Suite 1A
Fairbanks, Alaska 99701
(907) 456-0527
<http://www.nps.gov/aplic>**

Safety

File a **trip plan** with a friend. Write down where you are going and when you plan to return from your trip, the color and kind of vehicle you are driving and your license plate number.

Water temperatures range from a high of around 60 degrees Fahrenheit to near-freezing in the fall. Even on a hot day, water temperatures are still cold. Be able to recognize and treat hypothermia.

Water from the river or side streams should be treated by boiling, chemicals or filtration before drinking or cooking.

Bear Safety: both grizzly and black bears roam the Birch Creek drainage. Prudent river floaters and hunters keep a clean camp, cooking and storing food well away from tents. *Pack-it-in, Pack-it-out!*

Weather conditions can change rapidly at any time of the year. Thunderstorms upriver can cause water levels to rise rapidly. Birch Creek drainage encompasses nearly 1.4 million acres or about 2,187 square miles. Rain in one part of the drainage can have major impacts to the areas downriver. This river can exert tremendous force during high-water events.

Summer temperatures can reach the 80s and occasionally the 90s, but daily variations can be extreme; freezing temperatures have occurred in every month of the year, including July.

In winter, take survival gear and be prepared for the unexpected. Plan for high winds, deep snow and extreme changes in weather. Temperatures may be as much as 25 degrees colder than in Fairbanks. Overflow and open leads can create hazardous conditions.

Canoeing below Shotgun Rapids on Birch Creek

What Makes Birch Creek National Wild River Unique?

For some people, Birch Creek is unique because it is a quiet place to enjoy nature with road access at the beginning and end of a primitive floating experience. For others it is unique because it provides access to moose habitat during hunting season. And for others it provides a special window into the “life stages” of a waterway, traveling from a headwater stream to a meandering river. For many others who will probably never visit this river, Birch Creek is unique because it is here.

RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Birch Creek offers outstanding recreational opportunities for nonmotorized float boat use for those experienced with canoe, kayak or raft. Float trips usually take about 50 hours of actual water time to travel from Upper Birch Creek Wayside to Lower Birch Creek Wayside, a distance of 110 river miles.

Maximum river flows usually occur in May as a result of break-up. As summer progresses, water levels drop. Periods of high water may occur in late July or early August after summer rains. A summer storm can quickly raise the level of the water, making the river hazardous. Low water changes the face of the river, creating shallows and exposing rocks, logs and sweepers. Rock gardens are common during lower water levels, usually through July.



GEOLOGY

Birch Creek flows through an area described as the Yukon-Tanana Uplands, which is bounded on the south by the Alaska Range, an extension of the Pacific Mountains that includes the Sierra Nevada and Cascade Ranges; and on the north by the Brooks Range, an extension of the Rocky Mountains.

Ice lenses or ice wedges are geologic features visible along the river where areas of permafrost have become exposed. They occur where the river has cut through soft hill sides. As the cliff loses its soil face, the frozen ground is exposed as an ice wedge or lens.



Ice lens

HISTORY

The first settlers in this area were probably the Kutchin Indians. They traditionally occupied portions of Birch Creek to hunt for moose and waterfowl and to fish.

Miners moved into the area in 1893. Pitka Pavaloff and Cherosky, two Russian natives, panned for



Historic cabin

gold at what is now known as Pitka’s Bar. After obtaining a grubsteak at Fortymile in the Yukon Territory in Canada, they started the Birch Creek Gold Rush when they returned the next year followed by 100 men who began prospecting on adjoining tributaries.

Entrepreneurs followed the gold seekers, blazing trails, freighting goods and establishing road houses. Old miner and trapper cabins dot the landscape along the river. Remember, these structures and artifacts belong to everyone. *Take only pictures, leave only foot prints.*

WILDLIFE

Float Birch Creek if you want a primitive experience with the possibility of seeing wildlife.

The wildlife in this area do not see many humans, so you may see moose, caribou, black or grizzly bear, lynx, beaver, fox and more. Bald eagles, red-tail hawks, peregrine falcon and owls all make their summer homes along the banks of Birch Creek. Sandhill cranes, as well as Canada geese, common merganzers and other waterfowl visit Birch Creek on their way to summer breeding grounds.

Moose are the world’s largest member of the deer family. They feed on sedges, *equisetum* or horsetail, pond weeds and grasses as well as willow, birch and aspen leaves and twigs in bogs along the river.

Beaver, North America’s largest rodent, are plentiful along the lower section of Birch Creek. You will see a few beaver lodges and dams along old oxbows or tributaries; however, most live in bank dens along the river. Bank dens are simply holes dug into the stream bank that are then covered with a mass of sticks, mud and rocks. Look closely along the banks to see beaver slides— areas smoothed by beavers sliding into the water.

Peregrine falcons nest on rock outcroppings along the river. If you're close to a nest, you will hear the loud, rasping cries of adults warning you to stay away. When diving after prey, peregrines can reach speeds above 175 miles per hour. Also called a “Duck Hawk,” the peregrine feeds on waterfowl, sandpipers and swallows. Peregrine falcons return to the same nest site year after year.



Wolf tracks



**U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Northern Field Office
Fairbanks, Alaska**

